

3-8-1849

Letter from Henry Howe to James B. Finley

Henry Howe

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Cincinnati Thursday March, 8th, 1849-

Rev. Jas. B. Finley
Columbus O.

Dr. Friend,

Yesterday morning I intended in finding Dr. Jeff at his residence; but I did not take up my drawings as I considered them in too crude a state to be shown; I however explained to him the subjects of my sketches.

The Dr. more than confirmed my previous impressions of the interesting nature of your sketches of prison life. He stated that Judge McLane remarked that he thought there might be 50,000 copies sold in Ohio. To this I replied I had as leave have the opinion of some good, sensible mechanic, inasmuch as the latter would know better what would suit the taste of the multitude - all men judging of these matters by their own peculiar tastes. Yet from other remarks the Dr. made I am fully convinced that your work will be the foundation of an intensely valuable & lasting book. This makes me feel more than ever like taking hold of it & throwing all my energies in the direction of an extended circulation.

While the Dr. was reading your letter I watched the expression of his countenance quite narrowly. From it, I saw that he was not over & above gratified at the idea of any other establishment being concerned in its publication than that with which he is connected.

I asked him what he thought it would be worth to re-write & make it in all respects a superior work. He replied "that simply to re-write the ~~late~~ materials you have would be worth \$200. But to make it the nucleus for a more extensive production, taking in its range the subject of prison discipline as it exists in Europe as well as this elsewhere in this country (for which guide an extensive course of reading would be required) would ~~be~~ ^{be} worth \$500. Yet

he should charge rather freely but \$300 for so doing."

In accordance with your request I asked him "after the mss are re-written what will they be worth?" He replied "I cannot tell;" and then I suppose to draw me out ~~inquired~~ ^{inquired} my opinion, to which I rejoined "\$500 to perhaps \$600." Having thus drawn me, he went on to remark, somewhat in this wise. "The Harpus I think might give for the mss. in its present state \$500 & perhaps more, and they would give it to some of their writers to prepare for the press. A young man, a friend of mine who had just graduated at a college sold them a biography of his brother for \$300 which cost him only about a month's labor.*" He further remarked ~~that~~ in the course of conversation that the Book Concern (of which he is in such cases ~~to~~ agent) are anxious to publish it and would rather than not obtain it give more than they would otherwise.

I was gratified with the Dr's. personal appearance & his mental characteristics so far as they developed themselves in ^{the} ~~the~~ brief interview I had with him. He is certainly a man of superior abilities & has certain qualities of sharpness & shrewdness that would render him well fitted for a mercantile business. He was evidently alarmed that I should step in and take this enterprise out of the hands of "the Concern," for which I of course cannot in the least blame him.

Dr. Jeff thinks it more than probable that he will accept the invitation of Mr. Dewey to come up and spend some little time at the Penitentiary to collect facts for its history; He would not come up however before June, at which time the summer heat would render an escape from the city desirable.

From the Dr's. remarks about the price of the work when finished I should judge he thought the mss. would be worth somewhere in the neighborhood of \$800. For me to pay such a

* A friend at my elbow who has been for years engaged in New York in the book business, when I mentioned the above said, "I guess he has never had any experience in selling mss. to publishers; the Harpus reject 10 books that are offered to them, when they accept one."

P.S. - Since writing the foregoing I have read it over to the friend whom I mentioned to whom allusion is made in the note on the foregoing page. He remarked that it was all humming about the Harpers giving \$500 for the ms. in its present state - that he doubted if they would even give \$200. One furthermore observed that it was not one of the kind of books that that firm publish - that it was miserably a local work.

This last idea is true to a certain extent. The book in the main would be about the OHIO Penitentiary, - hence while the people of this would have some stake in the matter & hence would extensively patronize it, - yet in Indiana, Illinois & other western states this fact would weaken the interest that in other circumstances would be taken in a work of this nature. This fact is to be taken into consideration when we view the book in a mercantile light solely.

I have made an estimate of the cost of the book & profits to be derived from it. To manufacture the book so as to make it worth at retail \$1.50 would be worth I should judge 55 cents per copy. On low-priced books it is always advisable to give agents a greater commission in proportion than on expensive works. I am now furnishing my Ohio to agents at \$1.80. It is always the best policy to be as liberal with agents as you can consistently as it is for the mutual interest of all concerned - therefore I should think it advisable to give agents 70 cents per copy. This seems a large sum to my acquaintance; but there are publishers who give as much as one half. Were you to have experience in the agency business & compelled to trudge from farm-house to farm-house (which in this western country will average from 1 to 2 miles apart) & in many cases not find people at home - be exposed to the inclemency of the weather & oftentimes compelled to carry several pounds of mail on your back to obtain subscribers & then visit again to deliver the book, you would be of opinion that 70 cents would not be too great a compensation. This would be putting the book at 80 cents to the agent leaving 25 cents to the publisher over the cost of manufacturing.

Engraving & Sterotyping say	\$9.00
Copy-right say	6.00
	<u>\$15.00</u>

Then the first cost to the publisher would be \$15.00. The publisher's profits at 25 cents per copy would be \$25.00 for 1000 copies - therefore at this rate when he had sold 5000 copies ($5000 \times \$2.50 = \125.00) he would just get the money back he had expended for the first cost viz: the stereotyping, engraving & copyright. And after this he would (provided he met with no losses) clear \$25.00 for every thousand and copies sold.

I trust you will pardon me for this long communication. I wish to place all the facts in my power before you that you might fully understand the business & a clear ~~recognition~~ ^{conception} in view of all the light in my power to cast upon it.

^{own} cash on the delivery of the mss. would be out of the question; whereas as I should have to pay for engraving & stereotyping some \$800 or \$900 beside the responsibilities connected with the printing, paper & binding. And after all there is a possibility of its proving a failure in a mercantile point of view. Yet I might pay as large a sum as \$500 ~~or \$600~~ ^{or \$700} provided sufficient time be given for printing, & giving (if required) a lien on the stereotypic plates which would be more than ample security for the value of the engraving. It however and an arrangement of this kind could not be effected I could pay you a certain per centage on each copy sold, making it sufficiently large so that if a large number were sold you would obtain much more than in any other way although it would consequently take a longer time.

Dr. Tappan will have the mss. in complete readiness by the first of August. If I published it, I would have it put forth with stereotypic & circulated next fall.

I expect to leave here for the north next week. About the 7th. of April & perhaps before I shall be at Cleveland for a few days. About the 20th. of that month I expect to be at New Haven Conn. & should like to hear from you at either place.

When in New York on my way home, I shall make arrangements for having these drawings made ready for engraving. If it is decided that I publish it, I shall then be ready to go on & have them engraved. After we had got off one or two editions from the plates & the experiment proved a good one, I should feel justified in having quite a number of superior designs made & engraved illustrating striking scenes in the lives of some of the more prominent characters introduced.

In conclusion I must express the fervent hope that you & I will come to some satisfactory arrangement respecting this publication. The sooner it is effected the better as my mind will then be settled & I shall have more time for maturing plans for spreading it before "the people".

With my regards to Mr. Dewey, I remain
Yours Very Truly
Henry Howe.

Mr. Howe
April 8 49